

US autoworkers support European Ford workers' fight against concessions: "We are all behind you in the United States"

Marcus Day
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To send a statement of support to the Ford Workers Rank-and-File Committee in Europe and its fight against concessions and job cuts, email autoworkers@wsws.org.

Autoworkers in the United States are voicing support for the courageous stand being taken by their brothers and sisters at Ford Motor Company in Europe against threats of wage cuts and job losses. Last September, Ford put a question mark over the future of its plants in Saarlouis, Germany, and Almussafes, Spain, near Valencia.

Pitting workers in a *Hunger Games*-style competition against each other, management has demanded that each plant submit proposals for the largest possible cuts to wages and working conditions, with the "losing" plant threatened with closure. The unions—IG Metall in Germany, the UGT in Spain—as well as the union-dominated "works councils" are working closely with Ford to draw up the plans for cost cuts.

In response, workers at Ford in Europe recently formed a rank-and-file committee to organize a fight against the attempts to divide them in a fratricidal bidding war. The committee issued a statement last week demanding no concessions and the defense of jobs at all work locations.

"We are all behind you in the United States," a Ford worker in Ohio told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, addressing himself to his brothers and sisters in Europe. "You have to fight one minute longer than they are. Stand up and demand action. The works council sounds like a racket."

"The UAW tries to whipsaw us against the Mexican workers," he continued. "They do that all the time in the US between plants. 'If you don't produce here, they will send the F-150 somewhere else.' They do it all the time."

Ford's drive to cut costs in Europe is part of a global restructuring campaign by the major automakers, as they seek to offset the costs of the transition to electric vehicle

(EV) production through savage attacks on workers' jobs and wages.

With increasing frequency, auto companies are announcing multibillion-dollar investments in EV manufacturing. Behind this, Wall Street is exerting enormous pressure for labor costs to be slashed and workers' exploitation to be intensified. On Tuesday, an article in *Bloomberg* reported that Ford was planning to spend an additional \$10–\$20 billion to accelerate the shift to EVs over the next five to 10 years. This transition will be underwritten with an as-yet ambiguously defined "reorganization" plan.

"The new plan also envisions a reworked Ford organizational chart, including the hiring of an unspecified number of engineers specializing in disciplines relatively new to the company, such as battery chemistry, artificial intelligence and EV software," the article stated. In addition, Ford is reportedly considering "spinning off" part of its EV enterprise, in order to attract the type of hyper-speculative investment that has been showered on EV startups.

In an ominous indication of what the reorganization will mean for workers, *Bloomberg* reported that the initiative is being overseen by Doug Field, a former top executive for Tesla, notorious for its dangerous, sweatshop conditions.

Ford's efforts are mirrored by the other automakers, which are seeking to create largely temporary, low-wage workforces. General Motors also recently announced that it was increasing its investments in EVs, upgrading its Lake Orion plant in Michigan and opening a battery plant in the state under a joint venture, Ultium Cells, LLC. Workers at Ultium are expected to be paid just \$17–\$22 an hour, in line with the poverty wages that supplemental workers in the assembly plants make.

The WSWS spoke this week with autoworkers at several plants across the US about the situation confronting Ford workers in Europe and their efforts to organize a struggle across borders.

Mack and Volvo Trucks

A worker at the Mack Trucks plant in Macungie, Pennsylvania, and member of a rank-and-file committee at his factory said he was encouraged by the formation of a similar committee of autoworkers in Germany.

“It is heartening to see the growth of automotive rank-and-file committees internationally. I am proud to stand with you as a Mack Trucks worker in America,” he said. “Once autoworkers everywhere recognize the importance of these committees we will be able to fight these money-hungry corporations that keep taking from us. Good work!”

Travis, a worker at the Volvo Trucks New River Valley plant in Virginia, told the WSWS, “I’m sad to hear that workers are being forced to bid against each other in countries which are both part of the European Union. If the tactic which the corrupt leadership of Ford is playing is allowed to continue, it would be a devastating blow to either the Spanish or German economy. This is abhorrent and the workers themselves must band together in international solidarity and refuse to accept any difference between the two contracts.

“This is how the ruling elites maintain their despotic stranglehold in constantly pitting the working class against each other. Keep in mind that they need YOUR votes to proceed with this, so do not give it to them.”

He said that if workers defy demands for concessions, it would “show Ford for the corrupt criminal swine that they are, just like their founder who was a member of the Nazi party and had no moral compass at all [Henry Ford was a well-known anti-Semite and early admirer of Hitler—WSWS]. Vote ‘no’ on every single deal, and organize information exchanges between the two plants. I recommend using the app Reverso to break the language barrier. From America, in Solidarity.”

A worker at the Ford Chicago Assembly Plant drew parallels between the union-backed attacks on jobs and wages that workers confront in Europe and the attacks workers are facing in the US.

He said the company is “trying to cut costs to make more money. Ford will close more plants as it gets closer to building EV. The 2023 contract is key for Ford and other automakers. The UAW says that they will fight, but it will be just a show. Like I said before, ‘make a lie, make it big, keep it simple’—that’s the UAW.”

The trade unions today represent the interests of management and not workers, he said, and thus have reached a dead end. “We must end the unions, they are no good for the working class people; only for themselves and the companies they work for.”

Pointing to the danger of war in Europe by the US and NATO against Russia, he added, “It’s troubling times right now for everyone. We may be going to war. ... I hope not.”

When told about Ford’s attempts to pit workers in Germany and Spain against each other in a fratricidal competition to “save” jobs, a worker at Ford Kansas City Assembly said, “That’s awful. Even more so if their union reps are being crooked.”

She said she hoped the workers “can call an emergency meeting, and if neither place gives up anything they can’t close both. They need to get in contact with each other and strengthen their stance.

“They should all strike together. Connect over Facebook or whatever they use in those counties and strike at the same time.” If she were in a position to make such a decision, she said, she’d call a strike at all the plants in the US in solidarity.



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Ford Chicago and Kansas City